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Summary

A survey of Alaska corrections personnel reveals that employees in all classifications tend to have more than the minimum education or experience required for their positions. More than 74 percent of college-educated corrections personnel earned degrees and more than 40 percent acquired their experience outside Alaska. The advantages and disadvantages of hiring large numbers of employees whose education and experience were gained elsewhere are discussed in the context of the unique problems of correctional service delivery in so large and diverse a state.

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PROFESSIONALISM IN THE ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS:
EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE

by

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ABSTRACT

A survey of Alaska Corrections Personnel reveals that employees in all classifications tend to have more than the minimum education or experience required for their positions. More than 75 percent of college-educated corrections personnel earned degrees and more than 40 percent acquired their experience outside Alaska. The advantages and disadvantages of hiring large numbers of employees whose education and experience were gained elsewhere are discussed in the context of the unique problems of correctional service delivery in so large and diverse a state.

"In corrections the main ingredient for changing people is other people." So stated the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (1967:93). But, like many observers who view educated and trained personnel as essential to the achievement of correctional goals and objectives, the Commission noted the "gaps in the quantity and, perhaps even more significantly, in the quality of available manpower."

The dearth of educated and trained personnel continued to be lamented by the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals which wrote in 1973 "A critical point in corrections is lack of education among its personnel. (The problem has been) relieved only slightly by the Law Enforcement Education Program." (467) Both commissions recommended that educational institutions become involved in the development of correctional studies in colleges and universities and in the design of training programs.

In most correctional systems variously defined "treatment personnel" are required to have a certain level of education and training/experience. The roles of personnel who fall under the treatment rubric are so diverse that specific qualifications cannot be standardized. They include psychologists and psychiatrists, counselors, social workers, teachers, recreation specialists, etc., and in most states the qualifications of each of these groups are the same regardless of the agency in which they are employed. Correctional systems employ two types of staff whose roles are very specifically tied to correctional goals and objectives - the corrections officer who deals with

imprisoned inmates and the probation/parole officer who deals with offenders in the community. Most of the attention given to correctional staff must be addressed to one or the other of these two.

This paper assesses the professionalization of correctional officers and probation/parole officers in the "new" correctional system of Alaska, the 49th state, as measured by the self-reported education and training/experience of these true "corrections" employees.

Role Importance

Within the prison itself the custodial officer has been considered the staff member with the greatest potential as a change agent. The 1967 President's Commission viewed the correctional officer as the "most influential. . . by virtue of their numbers and their daily intimate contact with offenders" (96). Many researchers have noted the significance and complexity of the correctional officers role (Cressey, 1960; Glaser, 1964; Fogel, 1974; and others), and have reiterated the importance of custody staff involvement in the collaborative institution suggested by the Task Force Report.

Suggestions for capitalizing on the potential impact of the correctional officer include "job enlargement" (Hulin and Blood, 1968; Brief et al. 1976), reduction of the custody/treatment dichotomy (Crissey, 1960; Schrag, 1961), improved recruitment and retention efforts (Downey and Signori, 1958; Zald, 1962), prison reorganization, (Duffee, 1973; Smith and Fenton, 1978), and

improved education and training (The National Manpower Survey of the Criminal Justice System, 1978). Most of these suggestions have not been institutionalized though some areas of the country and some individual institutions have incorporated them.

The probation/parole officer, the other purely correctional employee, also has a significant impact upon the offenders with whom he/she works. The role of the probation/parole officer is complex and requires a marriage of the roles of police officer and social worker since he must supervise and control the offender's behavior in the community as well as provide assistance to the offender in adjusting to conventional (law abiding) behavior. The probation officer works in a less controlled environment (the community), cooperates with court and police personnel, and coordinates access to local human services agencies. He may or may not be an employee of a state corrections agency; some probation officers are local court employees, some employees of the state judiciary, and some of a separate state level department of probation. In order to maximize their effectiveness, both the President's Commission and the National Advisory Commission recommend advanced education, in-service training, and limitations and specializations of case loads.

In recognition of the importance of the probation/parole officer's role in the reintegration of offenders into the community most authorities agree that a bachelor's degree should be a minimum educational requirement for entering these crucial correctional positions and many recommend a master's degree (President's Commission, 1967; National Advisory Commission,

1973; American Correctional Association, 1978 et al). On the other hand, minimal educational requirements for correctional officers, whose impact is also considered pivotal, is usually completion of high school. This may be because the pay scale for prison line staff is so low nationally and because prisons must draw personnel from local communities. Prisons are usually located some distance from major population centers where persons with some college educations are likely to be found. (The clientele of the probation/parole agency is usually clustered in just such population centers.)

The National Manpower Survey of the Criminal Justice System (1978) reveals the difference in state requirements for these two kinds of personnel. In their survey they reported that no state required more than a high school diploma for corrections officers: twenty-five states required one, three states required an eighth grade education, and three had no requirements. No information was available for the remaining twenty. In seven states experience could be substituted for the high school requirement and in two experience could substitute for the eighth grade requirement. Experience and/or an examination was an additional requirement in thirteen states (p. 59). For probation/parole officers 46 states required a minimum of a bachelor's degree, two listed high school, one no requirements and there was no information for only one state (70). The actual educational attainment as determined by the survey differed from the standards for both correctional officers and probation/parole officers. The survey is used in this paper to compare qualifications and

attainments in Alaska with those in the rest of the country.

Background of the Study

Alaska entered the Union in 1959 and in the early years of statehood continued its territorial habit of turning serious criminal offenders over to the Federal Bureau of Prisons. In the mid-sixties a correctional work-camp was developed and by the mid-1970's several correctional institutions had been established. These adult facilities were operated by a Division of Corrections under the auspices of the cabinet level Department of Health and Human Services until 1984 when a Department of Corrections was established at the cabinet level. Prisoners with extremely long sentences continued to serve them in federal prisons in the continental United States.

Because of Alaska's immense size both correctional institutions and correctional field services (probation and parole) have been regionalized. There is no state prison of the sort common in most other states. The Alaska Department of Corrections operates seventeen facilities in three regions (see Appendix A). Most institutions and field offices are located in or near major population centers, but it should be noted that Alaska's second largest city has a population of less than 45,000. Population size has implications for staff recruitment. In small cities correctional officers are hired at the probationary (CO I) level. Incentive pay is used to induce supervisory officers (CO III) to transfer to "bush" areas.

Field services are operated in the same regions. Probation

officers are employees of the Department of Corrections and provide supervision to both probationers and parolees. Although all regions have some clients who can report in person there are regions where long distance supervision is the norm. Many clients live in areas accessible only by airplane. Although probation officers do fly to such villages much client contact is conducted by telephone (or radiophone) or with third party assistance. Incentive pay is also mandated for probation officers assigned to bush areas.

The relative newness of the state's correctional system and its early need for qualified personnel led to some interesting qualifications for the personnel categories of correctional officer and probation officer. Only experience is required for full performance (non-probationary) correctional officers. A minimum of a bachelor's degree plus experience is mandated for the full performance probation officer. It is interesting that for the custodial positions higher education may be substituted for experience and for the probation positions experience can substitute for the required education. (Appendix B)

There are position levels in both job classifications. Each level above entry requires at least one year at the preceding level "or equivalent experience elsewhere." This addendum is tied to the dearth of training available to Alaska corrections personnel in the early years. Experience elsewhere usually assured that the employee had had some training for the position. A substantial proportion of Alaska correctional officers and probation officers have had experience elsewhere.

There are three levels in the Correctional Officer (CO) category. The CO I is an entry level training position and promotion to CO II is assumed in six onths. Completion of basic officer training is expected before reaching CO II status. CO I applicants must be at least 18 years of age and must be able and willing to learn and carry out correctional officer duties. There are no other qualifications. A high school diploma is not required.

Applicants may be admitted directly to CO II status. However, they must meet minimum qualifications: six months experience as a Correctional Officer I in the State of Alaska or one year of equivalent experience, or a bachelor's degree in corrections, criminal justice, or some other social science area of study. The Correctional Officer III position is a supervisory one and requires at a minimum one year as CO II with the State of Alaska or the equivalent elsewhere or two years experience as a probation officer or Youth Counselor.

Though some probation officers are assigned to institutions, most work in a field setting supervising offenders in the community. There are five Probation Officer (PO) levels and a bachelor's degree or equivalent is required for these positions. The PO I position is an entry-level training position. The PO II position is considered the "full performance" level.

The minimum qualification for PO II is one year as a PO I but graduate education and/or specified experience may be substituted on a year-for-year basis. Probation officers in the higher

levels of the series (III, IV and V) perform supervisory duties and/or have increasing levels of responsibility. The series is sequential and each level requires one year of experience at the preceding level or equivalent elsewhere. Substitutions can be made but they vary by level: for example, graduate education can be substituted for experience on a year for year basis at the PO III level. See Appendix B.

Methodology

A personnel survey which sought self-reported data on education experience and training was developed and distributed with the cooperation of the Alaska Department of Corrections. The forms were distributed in October, November and December of 1984 to all Department employees in institutions and agencies throughout the state in all position categories from clerk to commissioner. The Department took responsibility for collecting the forms and forwarding them to the Justice Center for coding and analysis. The processing of the forms was completed in May, 1985.

To assess the response rate official figures from the closest personnel report (June, 1984) were used as a base. These figures were neither more nor less accurate than those for the following June since personnel recruitment was continuous during the fiscal year as prison populations grew. There were 816 employees in June of 1985. Of these, 467 were correctional officers and 84 were probation officers. Among corrections officers the response rate was 75.6% (N=353) and among probation officers 85.7% (N=72). This high response rate from corrections-specific employees

suggests a high level of professionalism.

Survey Results

In the area of education the personnel survey revealed that employees of the Alaska Department of Corrections tend to have more than the minimum education levels called for in state personnel position descriptions. Nearly half of the total respondents (47.8%) had at least an associate's degree (two years of college) and more than a third (35.1%) had at least bachelor's degrees. Of the 353 correctional officers, 36% had at least an associate's degree and a surprising 21% of the corrections officer respondents had at least a bachelor's degree.

Figure 1 compares Alaska Corrections Officers with the national sample presented in the National Manpower Survey (1978). Since this volume revealed that half the states require completion of high school for the entry level CO, Alaska compares quite favorably with the national group. No respondent in this category indicated less than a high school diploma or its equivalent (GED). Since more than 100 correctional officers did not respond to the survey we might surmise that many were reluctant to respond if they had not completed high school, so perhaps this comparison is not a legitimate one. Note that the Alaska survey asked for degrees/diplomas received. This has been translated into years of education for comparison purposes. Some officers who had made progress toward an associates degree are not included in the 13-15 category since they had only the high school diploma in hand.

Figure 1. Educational Level: Correctional Officers

Years of Education	Alaska Sample		National Sample
	#	%	%
Less than 12	na	na	18.9
12	224	63.5	54.2
13 - 15	52	14.7	22.6
16 or more	75	21.2	5.4
No response	2	.5	na
TOTAL	353	99.9	100

Probation Officers in the Alaska sample have educational levels comparable to those in the national survey. The data are presented in Figure 2. In Alaska 88.9% of probation officers have at least a bachelor's degree and 89.5% of those in the national survey do. But Alaska probation officers are less likely than those in the national survey to have graduate degrees; 27.8% compared to 36.0%.

Figure 2. Educational Level: Probation Officers

Years of Education	Alaska Sample #	%	National Sample %
Less than 12	na	na	.5
12	2	2.8	4.0
13 - 15	5	6.9	6.0
16	44	61.1	53.5
17 or more	20	27.8	36.0
No response	<u>1</u>	<u>1.3</u>	<u>na</u>
TOTAL	72	99.9	100.0

The National Manpower Survey also assessed educational upgrading after entry into the probation officer position and concluded that "the stability in the educational attainment of probation and parole officers over time is the result of a significant pattern of educational upgrading." (p. 74) In Alaska such upgrading while employed as a probation officer ranges from very difficult to impossible. Only four universities in the state offer master's level degrees and they are located in three cities. Many of the degrees available are not viewed as professionally valuable to the probation officer. An additional problem is access. Alaska is geographically very large and commuting for educational purposes is impossible for those assigned to distant areas of the state. Only eight (11%) of probation officers and thirteen (4%) of correctional officers reported that they were enrolled in college classes at the time of the survey. Not all of these were pursuing specific degrees; some were taking

courses for their own edification.

Correctional officers find school attendance very difficult because of shift schedules. Most officers work twelve hour shifts for seven days and are then off duty for seven days. Every other on-duty week is a swing shift. Such a schedule makes class attendance very difficult. However, corrections personnel appeared committed to further education. Seventy-three per cent of correctional officers (N=256) and 77% of probation officers (N=55) indicated that they planned to continue their educations.

Since prior experience is a requirement for virtually all full-performance (non-probationary) levels, an assessment of prior experience was considered important to the survey. At each level six months to one year of experience at the prior level is required but nearly every position includes the phrase "or equivalent elsewhere." This phrase appears in position descriptions for employees of all state agencies and is not peculiar to the Department of Corrections. As a new and growing state Alaska has had a need for increasing numbers of experienced employees qualified to step into openings at all levels. During the early years of statehood the need for trained personnel in entry positions was acute yet training programs were in their infancy. Previously trained employees from other states were often actively recruited for openings in Alaska's state agencies.

For the Department of Corrections this policy has resulted in employment of a substantial number of employees with prior experience elsewhere. Of the correctional personnel under

discussion 42.6% had had experience in non-Alaska agencies. Among correctional officers, 41.6% had prior experience elsewhere and among probation officers 47.2% had had experience elsewhere. The most interesting part of the experience segment of the survey was the kind of experience deemed equivalent by the state personnel office (and by the respondents themselves).

Data on prior experience elsewhere is presented in Figure 3. It had been assumed that equivalent experience elsewhere meant prior experience in other correctional systems and agencies. This proved to be the case among the probation officers. Of the thirty-four who had had prior experience, twenty-four (70.6%) had been employed in corrections. Of the 147 correctional officers who had prior experience the largest proportion had been police personnel (40.1%) and the smallest (25.2%) had been correctional employees.

Figure 3. Type of Experience by Employee Classification

Experience in:	Correctional Officers		Probation Officers		TOTAL	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Corrections	37	25.2	24	70.6	61	35.3
Military	43	29.3	3	8.8	46	26.6
Law Enforcement	59	40.1	7	20.6	66	38.2
Other	8	5.4			8	
TOTAL	147	100.0	34	100.0	173	100.1

In a state with preferential hiring for members of the mili-

tary, substantial numbers with military experience were not unexpected among both categories of employees. In reality it was the smallest prior experience category. Since a number of correctional officers indicated specifically that their experience was as military police (N=13), the proportion of correctional officers with law enforcement experience is even greater than Figure 3 shows.

Discussion

This paper has summarized the results of a survey of education, training and experience of Alaska Department of Corrections personnel. The survey was distributed to all personnel and was completed by more than 70% of the nearly 900 employees. The response rate for employees in corrections-specific job classifications was 66%. The large percentage of respondents permits extrapolation of the data to the Department as a whole. One conclusion drawn from the survey is that corrections personnel in Alaska are both well-educated and experienced.

Of 636 respondents to the survey, nearly half (47.8%) reported having at least a two-year college degree. There were 425 correctional officer and probation officer respondents; 46.6% (N=198) of this group had at least two years of college and 33% had four-year degrees. For the most part our respondents had more than the minimum educational requirements listed in position descriptions (see Appendix B).

The vast majority of college educated corrections employees received their degrees prior to their initial date of hire with

the Alaska Department of Corrections. Since college attendance is difficult for many employees, one item in the survey requested information on current enrollment in college classes. Only 26 (5%) of those in corrections-specific job classifications indicated that they were enrolled at the time the survey was completed (fall semester, 1984). Although these two items make it evident that it is difficult to work in corrections and attend school simultaneously, most respondents indicated that they planned to continue their educations. Seventy percent of the total respondents and 73% of the corrections-specific respondents expressed a desire to further their educations. The clear gap between plans and practice raises some important questions.

Although we cannot assume that everyone who plans to attend college would actually do so if the opportunity arose, we can assume that there are reasons for the large gap in numbers between those who actually have done or are doing so. There seem to be two major obstacles to pursuing educational goals: geography and scheduling.

Nearly every correctional facility or agency is in reasonably close proximity to one of the community colleges in the University of Alaska system. Thus opportunities to complete the two-year associate's degree are available. This degree is listed as a goal by 12.2% (N=77) of the respondents. Most of the respondents who plan to further their educations have a bachelor's degree or a graduate degree as their goal (165 listed bachelor's degrees; 123, master's degrees). Courses toward these degrees are available only in Anchorage, Fairbanks and Juneau.

Since the majority of Department of Corrections employees are employed in or near these cities the low percentage of employees who are currently enrolled in college courses suggests that geography is not the primary obstacle.

For correctional officers, who comprised more than half of our total sample, scheduling appears to be the major obstacle to completion of educational goals. Seventy-three percent of correctional officers indicated that they planned to continue their education but only 8% were enrolled in college courses at the time of the survey. The twelve hour work schedule of one week on, one week off and a swing shift every other work week makes class attendance very difficult, if not impossible. This work schedule was initiated by employees. Prior to its implementation the Department was better able to accommodate employees who were in school by permitting schedule adjustments and trade-offs with other officers. The new schedule is very popular with employees and should not be changed. However, we would recommend that employees who want to attend school should be permitted to apply for an "education schedule" which, if granted, would permit the employee to be on a straight shift for one four month period (semester) each year.

More than forty percent of the 425 respondents in corrections-specific job classifications reported prior experience in non-Alaska systems (Figures 2 and 3). While studies have demonstrated a high turnover rate among corrections personnel nationally, such employees seldom leave one state correctional system for employment in another. Alaska is an exception in that

it attracts migrants from other correctional systems. Salaries at all levels of state government are higher here than in other states. Corrections data for the year 1979 from the Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics (1983) show average annual salaries for corrections personnel to be as much as \$5000 higher in Alaska than in Oregon, Wisconsin and California (usually considered well-paying systems). Since prior experience in corrections permits entry into higher classification levels employment here is very attractive to corrections personnel from other systems.

As was noted above (Fig. 3) nearly 42% of correctional officers and 47% of probation officers had had experience outside Alaska prior to their initial hire. Respondents reported three major kinds of experience: corrections, military and law enforcement. Correctional officers brought more experience in law enforcement than in either the military or corrections areas. The appropriateness of police backgrounds for persons working with prisoners is questionable. People who enter law enforcement usually do so because they want to apprehend law breakers. This requires an attitude toward criminals which may not transfer well to the task of supervising them. Since the corrections officer has the greatest impact of all corrections employees on changing attitudes among prisoners, his attitude towards them is very important.

The extent to which police training and experience fit the state personnel office's criteria for equivalent experience may be tied to the Department's own training emphases. More in-

service training is offered in firearms certification/recertification than any other training area. CPR certification is a close second with prisoner transportation and drug identification the next most frequent offerings. Much of this is covered in police academies and continued firing range practice is required of most police officers.

The policy of hiring experienced personnel has other implications. The second largest group of our experienced respondents reported prior experience in other correctional systems. But corrections in Alaska has several unique features which make it different from other systems. All Alaska prisons and jails are small when compared to prisons in other states and many are multi-purpose facilities holding pre-trial prisoners as well as sentenced felons and misdemeanants. They are architecturally different and their populations are more diverse than those of most state prisons. Should facility management also be different? To what extent should Alaska emulate correctional practices and processes in other states? Do experienced employees influence institutional operations? These questions should be addressed in examining the state's policy of hiring experienced personnel.

An additional concern is the possibility that the policy of hiring experienced personnel excludes non-experienced applicants from consideration for hire. This could have an impact on the hiring of Alaska Natives or other minorities. Alaska Natives make up 34% of the prisoner population but only 4% of Department of Corrections employees. Although the Department encourages

Native hire the policy of hiring experienced personnel at the full performance (non-probationary) levels may mitigate against Native recruitment.

Since the state's early need for experienced employees at all levels has now been met and the Department's training operation has been expanded, future hires should be at the probationary levels (CO I and PO I). Training should focus on the unique features of Alaska corrections as well as standard operations and procedures. Probation officers should, for example, learn how to develop relationships within Native villages to improve distance supervision. To do so requires an understanding of traditional Native cultures.

In summary, the personnel survey has revealed potential problems in hiring policies and practices. They are related to the assessment of prior experience including the appropriateness of police experience as a prerequisite for corrections positions, the desirability of a homogeneous staff in a heterogeneous prison, and the possibility that discrimination has been built into the employee assessment process. At the same time the survey revealed a very high level of education among line staff in the state's jails and prisons. The number of employees with college degrees and the number who plan to further their educations reflect a high level of professionalism among Alaska Department of Corrections personnel.

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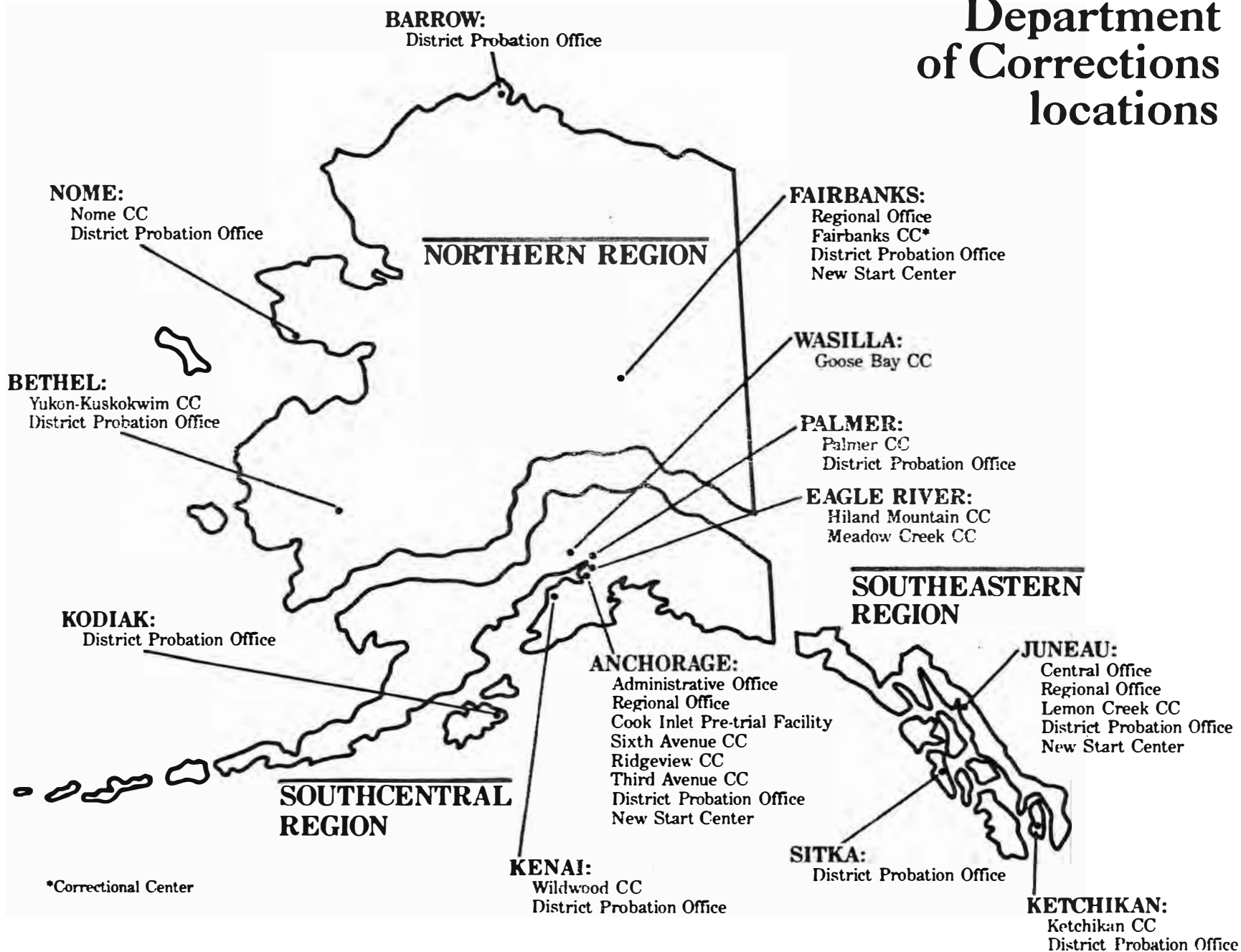
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Department of Corrections locations



CORRECTIONAL OFFICER II Class Code 7653
General Government Salary Range 13
Positions in: Juneau, Ketchikan, Anchorage, Eagle River,
Palmer, Sutton, Kenai, Fairbanks, Nome

Definition:

Under general supervision performs security work among prisoners in an adult correctional institution.

Minimum Qualifications:

Six months experience as a Correctional Officer I with the State of Alaska including successful completion of the Field In-Service Training Manual, Part I (orientation), the Correctional Officer Entry Level Training Academy Program, and Field In-Service Training Manual, Part II program.

OR

One year of experience equivalent to Probation Officer I, Youth Counselor, or Correctional Officer I which included training in custody and control of prisoners and institutional security procedures; self-defense and riot control; use of weapons, mechanical restraints, and chemical agents; criminal law and procedures; first aid and emergency trauma treatment; administration of medication; record-keeping and report writing; counseling and other interpersonal communication techniques.

OR

A bachelor's degree or the equivalent in corrections, criminal justice, law enforcement, behavioral science or a closely related field.

Note: Employees must be willing to work shift assignments and on-call availability may be required. Some positions may require bilingual abilities.

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PROBATION OFFICER II	4343-16
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PROBATION OFFICER V	4346-20
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Minimum Qualifications:

Probation Officer I

Bachelor's Degree, or the equivalent, from an accredited college with a major in psychology, anthropology, sociology, social work, criminology, criminal justice or closely related field.

Substitution: The following may be substituted for the required education on a year for year basis: Experience in (a) collecting, evaluating, interpreting social, behavioral and vocational data; (b) developing and implementing treatment programs for socially maladjusted persons. OR two years of experience in kind and level of Probation Program Service Aide IV/V.

Probation Officer II

One year as a Probation Officer I with the State of Alaska or the equivalent elsewhere.

Substitutions: The following may substitute for the required experience on a year-for-year basis: (a) Graduate study in psychology, anthropology, sociology, social work, criminology, criminal justice or closely related field. (b) Professional social case work or Youth Counselor III experience in developing and implementing treatment for socially maladjusted persons.

Probation Officer III

One year experience as a Probation Officer II with the State of Alaska or the equivalent elsewhere.

Substitution: Two years as Youth Services Institution Unit Leader, or equivalent.

Probation Officer IV

One year as a Probation Officer III OR one year of experience as Youth Treatment Program Supervisor, with the State of Alaska or equivalent elsewhere; PLUS three years professional experience in: probation work, social case work, or correctional rehabilitation counseling.

Substitution: Graduate study in criminal justice, social work or public administration may be substituted for the required general experience on a year-for-year basis up to a maximum of three years.